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## 'Showdown' Year Forecast for Gorbachev

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WASHINGTON—For Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev, under fire inside his own country for his party and government reforms, the coming year will provide a make-or-break test of his ability to survive, the CIA's chief analyst of the Soviet leadership said Wednesday.

The "showdown," Marc Zlotnik told a Smithsonian Institution meeting, could come at the next meeting of the Soviet Central Committee in June. Gorbachev, Zlotnik said, has aroused substantial opposition both inside the Politburo and in the Central Committee and has left Soviet politics in its most "unstable" state in 20 years.

Opposition to Gorbachev's reforms is coalescing into identifiable groups, Zlotnik said, and the Central Committee will make plans for a key Communist Party conference next year that will oust many disgraced functionaries.

Some other Kremlinologists, such as Prof. Timothy Colton of the University of Toronto, believe the Central Committee meeting that will prove decisive for Gorbachev will occur in the fall. Otherwise, he generally endorsed Zlotnik's assessment.

"Logically, Gorbachev is facing the most difficult period since he took office two years ago or that he is likely to face during his entire tenure," Colton said in a telephone interview. "The odds are 3 or 4 to 1 he will survive, but it's not at all a foregone conclusion."

But Arnold Horelick, director of the Rand Corp.-UCLA center for Soviet studies, said, "Not all Soviet specialists see Gorbachev in imminent danger of overthrow." The specialists are increasingly divided between those who think Gorbachev himself is in trouble and those, like Horelick, who think only Gorbachev's program is in trouble, Horelick said.

But it is Zlotnik's views that probably have the greatest weight within the White House as it moves this year toward a new arms control agreement with the Soviet Union and possibly a new summit meeting between President Reagan and Gorbachev.

Zlotnik, who heads the leadership politics branch of the CIA's Soviet analysts, told an audience made up primarily of scholars that the 11-man Politburo is split into three groups: Gorbachev and his two hard-core supporters; three opponents, who are essentially holdovers from previous regimes, and five men who are neither basically for or against him.

### Central Committee Stand

The key swing figure is Yegor K. Ligachev, the Kremlin's No. 2 man, who has taken several significant positions that do not coincide with Gorbachev's. Ligachev, for example, has called for stronger military defenses, opposed secret voting for party offices and opposed mandatory retirement of party officials at age 65, Zlotnik said.

"Ligachev is more cautious than Gorbachev," Zlotnik said, "and he has signaled . . . that if Gorbachev leaves, he could continue to move forward [with the present Kremlin program] but at a slower pace. Ligachev is a threat to Gorbachev," and steps have been made recently, presumably by Gorbachev, to curb his power.

A greater but parallel problem for Gorbachev, Zlotnik said, is the Central Committee of several hundred party officials from around the country who elect the Politburo. Some 25% of the committee has been replaced by Gorbachev, but many of the rest appear to have grown opposed to him, Zlotnik said, since he became general secretary of the party in 1985.

Five groups of opposition in the committee can be identified, he said. These include officials tainted by corruption, who fear that the anti-corruption drive will get them; older officials who do not want to retire; regional officials who fear Gorbachev's reform will cost them their jobs, and ideological conservatives who feel that Gorbachev is moving too fast.

### Reforms 'Watered Down'

In the fifth group, Zlotnik said, are defense officials who oppose Gorbachev's efforts to hold down the growth of military spending, his introduction of civilians to monitor defense and security issues and some of his arms-control steps, such as the 18-month nuclear test ban moratorium.

Opposition to Gorbachev's programs, Zlotnik said, was seen in the Central Committee's January meeting when it "watered down" most of his reform proposals "but added stronger language on the need to strengthen defenses."

As a result, Gorbachev called for a party conference to circumvent the committee, Zlotnik said. To be held next year to deal with reform issues, the conference will probably be made up of several thousand delegates, largely chosen by Gorbachev and his loyalists. It will have the power to drop members from the Central Committee.

"Between now and the party conference will be the critical time for him," Zlotnik said. "Gorbachev

will control the conference, and he'll be OK afterwards. But until then he's walking a tightrope" with Central Committee opponents and a lack of a Politburo majority.

The Central Committee, which will set the precise agenda, date and other details of the party conference, has the authority to oust Gorbachev when it next meets in June, Zlotnik said. Gorbachev is likely to win any showdown, he predicted, but "it is a much more

unstable situation than any time in the last 20 years."

Colton sees the showdown coming at a committee meeting in November or December, rather than the one in June. "Things are certainly very fluid at the top," he said, "with lots of evidence of people shifting positions" as Gorbachev pushes his reforms.

Peter Reddaway, director of the Smithsonian's Kennan Center for Soviet Studies, cautioned that if Gorbachev survives through the party conference, "it doesn't mean he's home and dry, in there out to the year 2000. It will reduce pressure on him for a time, but the big question will be how successful his democratization and economic reform efforts will be." If they fail, he said, "he could quickly be in trouble again."

Horelick agreed, in a telephone interview, that some Politburo members want to restrain Gorbachev. "But I don't see Gorbachev personally in danger, because I

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